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# PROCEEDINGS

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## English Language Teaching: Enhancing Students' Motivation with Task-Based Activities

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### Abstract

This paper covers the issue of avoiding traditional frontal teaching through the usage of task-based activities. Task based activities are proved to make the lessons more interactive and increase students' curiosity, engagement and motivation during the lessons of English language as a foreign language. The paper also deals with motivation and enhancing motivation of the students by using the already mentioned task-based activities. The introduction covers motivation as a pedagogical process, its definition and then proceeds with task based activities and their implementation.

What follows after that is the summative and formative assessment as new ways of grading and evaluating the students. With these types of assessments students become more motivated because they are graded at each lesson and get feedback from their teacher which helps them improve their weaker sides.

Motivation, learning, interactive tasks and formative and summative assessment are factors that are closely linked within the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language. The purpose of this paper is to get closer to the task-based activities and also to provide a suggestion of how to implement these activities in English language teaching altogether with the assessment process.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Task-based Activities, Formative and Summative Assessment

## **1. Introduction**

Teaching any other educational activity in the school is organized activity that is accomplished through a very important social function and as such it is of particular interest. The main tasks are: acquiring knowledge of the objective reality, developing physical and mental abilities and developing the educational values. The objectives of teaching are multiple, but learning can be singled out as the most dominant aim. Learning is the most important activity that deals with people throughout their whole life. It is defined as a relatively permanent change of an individual that is manifested in their behavior, which is built upon previous activities. Talking about humans, the reflexes are just innate and some cover emotional processes which means that everything has been learned and will be learned in the field of knowledge, socialization, motivation and emotions. Despite the existence of the necessary potential for successful learning, motivation is also required. My personal experience shows that students' achievements at schools are roughly due to 50% of their capacity, 25% of their motivation and 25% quality of learning.

Motivation in learning has emerged as a major issue. One individual may possess the necessary potential opportunities and all other necessary conditions for successful learning, but if motivation is not enough it is hardly possible to make a progress. Because of this, motivation in learning becomes one of the central problems in the pedagogical psychology. According to Yoshiyuki Nakata "Motivation lies in the relationship between cognition, feelings and emotions, and the environment, and that the inclusion of such elements will help delve deeper into the grounds of motivation research" (Nakata 2013).

Motivation as a psychological process is necessary to be known, because with this knowledge the behavior of the entities all around are to be understood and the desired targeting which is to raise and educate the youth should be achieved. This is why, as a teacher in secondary technical school and a visiting lecturer at a private university, I always try to realize interesting educational content for the subject of English as a foreign language. English language seems to be part of students' everyday life because of the new trend of computerization of the schools and allows them access to the Internet which provides a closer insight to the language itself. These circumstances contributed that the English language becomes their preoccupation and eagerness to acquire the language on a higher level.

Task-based activities, which are to be more thoroughly justified in the following chapter, help students become more motivated simply because they are always engaged during the lesson, they work cooperatively with their partners or in groups and at the end of this type of lessons, students are also able to expose their creativity by doing oral presentations that can be prepared on power point or another facility. The implementation

of these tasks provide positive outcome of the lesson where at the end, both students and the teacher feel satisfied and have achieved their aims.

## **2. Task Based Activities**

In order to avoid the “traditional” teaching through which the teacher only teaches and the students listen and usually fall asleep, some scholars imposed the task-based activities and defined them as “a piece of classroom work that involves students in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning and in which the attention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form” (Nunan 9:2004).

It is a well-known fact that for English language learners the hardest thing is to learn grammar. If they are asked to listen to the teacher’s explanations of grammar and then do some tasks connected only to it, they are bored and do not feel happy doing them. If the activities are only focused on grammar, it is difficult to make a communicational pattern simply because it is hard to produce the language situation in a natural way. If they are oriented only towards grammar it is impossible to use authentic language and students only make the drill. They only go through the tasks by which they just memorize some forms by heart or some suffixes and prefixes which are afterwards unnatural for them to use in real-life communication. Contrary to this situation, task-based activities are oriented towards learning and using the language in a natural way.

There are different models and techniques of using and applying task-based activities in English language learning and teaching. What is essential about these tasks is that students are asked to cooperate with their peers, interact between each other and help each other while doing the tasks. What is essential and special about them is that they cannot be done individually. Since interactive teaching is something natural in learning and teaching English as a foreign language, it simply means that more effective classes are going to be achieved by using these tasks. Interactive lessons are always more interesting and the features of this type of activities are:

- group and pair work
- students engagement throughout the whole lesson
- the usage of authentic language connected to the topic
- students usually make oral presentations
- students express their creativity



There are different frameworks of using task-based activities, but the one I find the most attractive is the categorization of Willis (1996:37) who divides the activities into the following chain as described in Table 1:

**Table 1: Implementation of Task-Based Activities**

1. Listing	Within this stage students collect data from the Internet, brainstorm ideas on a certain task or make interviews in the certain topic
2. Ordering and sorting	This stage can be done with a listening task, filling gaps in a chronological order choosing the most important information
3. Comparing and contrasting	This category can be suitable for true or false questions or comparing and contrasting ideas from a text and personal ideas and experiences
4. Problem-solving	At this stage students can solve a problem connected to business or another field i.e. they are put into a real-life situation providing a hint for the particular situation from the field
5. Sharing-personal experience	Students at this point give their personal opinions and experiences about the real-life situation previously mentioned
6. Creative tasks and projects	At this final stage students can either make power-point-presentations or the teacher can set out a group project to be done in a particular period of time again connected to the topic

Using Willis's model of task-based activities can be very interesting and practical. Usually, the teacher does not need much additional resources or time. What he or she is intended to do is to implement the previously explained in **Table 1** tasks of the categories from 1 to 6. For a target group of learners who study ESP in the field of business management where the main goal of the lesson would be "making presentations at meetings", the above-mentioned and justified categories of the lesson are implemented as follows below. The lesson is taken from the book *Business Benchmark*<sup>\*</sup> and the level is higher-advanced.

Task 1: Listing

Within this task, students find out what they already know about the given topic and use the already known vocabulary. They discuss questions in small groups by doing

interviews and search on the Internet if they need some additional information. The questions they have to answer are the following:

- Do you think adults or children eat more ice-cream
- Which are the dominant brands (local, national, multinational)
- Which factors are more likely to give an ice-cream company more competitive (price, advertising, variety, tradition, fashion)

Students take notes and the teacher monitors their work and writes the most important vocabulary on the board.

**Task 2: Ordering and sorting**

Students do a listening task (an extract from a meeting at a company where one lady gives presentation to her manager). Their task is to listen to the presentation and fill in the gaps of the taken notes during the presentation. The answers are actually essential information about the total market of ice-cream in one year, the growth rate, annual purchase, local tastes, and price war.

**Task 3: Comparing and contrasting**

Students are given true/false statements from the presentation they have listened to, giving explanation if they are true or false and why. By doing this task, they can also share their thoughts and beliefs about a certain issue being subject of previous discussion.

**Task 4: Problem – solving**

Students are given two files (pie-charts) and discuss the given information. They prepare a short presentation in pairs in order to give the details from the charts. After each presentation the listeners (the other group) are supposed to make up at least two arguable questions connected to a situation that has to be solved.

**Task 5: Sharing personal experiences**

At this stage students share their personal opinions and experiences about eating ice-creams, their favorite flavors, companies, favorite commercials, and famous persons' endorsement in ads and suggest strategies about how can companies get a competitive advantage in our country and abroad.

**Task 6: Creative tasks and projects**

Students read 3 texts about investigations into the ice-cream market. Then, each student chooses one of the texts (about a company selling ice-cream) and takes notes about the essential information in order to present it at a meeting later. After that each group presents the information to the other group using the notes as a guide. Then, each group listens to their partners' group presentations and while listening they prepare one question which they are to ask at the end of the presentation. Here they can either use short hand outs; a power-point presentation or they can write their main points on the white board and of course be creative. After students have done the presentations, the teacher is to evaluate their presentations according to an assessment table with the provided criteria (Table 2):

**Table 2: Formative and summative assessment**

<b>INTRODUCTION – total points 6</b>					
Introducing the present situation of the company					
Gained the listeners' attention					
Defining the goals of the company clearly					
<b>APPROPRIATE MATERIAL – total points 30</b>					
Interesting					
Relevant to topic					
Persuasive					
Points Clarified					
Conclusion					
Questions – initiate a discussion of the possible problems					
<b>LANGUAGE – total points 10</b>					
Accuracy – 4					
Vocabulary – 4					
Originality – 2					
<b>NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION – total points 4</b>					
Eye contact – 1					
Body language – 1					
Dress code – 2					
<b>USE OF AIDS – total points 10 (two are sufficient)</b>					
Power point 5					
Handouts/ white-board 5					
Photos 5					
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>	<b>60</b>				

As formative and summative assessment has become a trend in the educational process, one should make difference between both of these assessments and of course to contrast it with the traditional grading. What was previously thought by assessment or grading the students was to give them a grade they deserve from their tests, from their engagement during the lessons and their behavior in some situations. Formative and summative assessments consist of some of the mentioned factors but in a different way. Formative assessment means to monitor the work of the student and provide an ongoing feedback on each lesson or a particular point of time and is intended to help the students improve their results by acquiring the feedback from the teacher. But from one hand, formative assessment does not cover the whole grade the student is about to get and has lower value for the student itself. On the other hand, summative assessment means to evaluate the student's results at the end of the unit or the year and it is usually conducted through final tests, projects, papers, essays etc. This type of assessment usually has higher value than formative assessment. Students usually do not make a big difference of these assessments but they take it as part of the school experience and consider it as a process to make a better impression to the teachers. At the end, it can be concluded that

both assessments are equally important not taking into consideration the fact that the formative is taken as something that has lower value than the summative assessment. Both aspects are closely connected and are equally important for the students' improvement.

For the lesson previously described altogether with the implemented task-based activities, both summative and formative assessment can be implemented. After each presentation (see task 6 – creative tasks and projects), students make peer review about what they liked and disliked about their partners' presentation. Here the teacher comments for the attempts for making the presentations at class. Maybe the first attempt to make a presentation will not be successful because it is the end of the lesson. Each attempt of the students is encouraged and appraised where the students get the feedback from the teacher as a formative assessment. From my personal experience of this lesson, using formative assessment meets the main lesson's goal. Students knew they were successful without getting the "traditional" grades, but from the comments and appraisal of the teacher - telling them that they did a great job and will do really good meeting presentations in their near future when being involved in business related jobs.

Praise and criticism influence the motivation of the student a lot. The new researches confirm these beliefs, but show some peculiarities arising from their use and should be taken into account. If praise and criticism as means of motivation act positively or negatively, depend largely on the psychological traits of the individual. Praise can have positive effect on all students, but with students who are introverted praise strengthens their confidence. Criticism applies to extroverted students. It acts positively to them because they are open, confident in their abilities, but they have troubles accepting criticism.

According to my own personal experience, appraisal is considered as a very important factor when teaching English as a foreign language because when students are appraised in front of the classroom they become more motivated and of course more self-confident to use the language at classes and make interesting presentations and role-plays.

### **3. Conclusion**

Motivation is really essential when speaking about learning in different terms. If motivation is accomplished, learning is proved to be successful. From the above mentioned types of tasks that increase students' motivation and make lessons more interactive, it can be concluded that teaching and learning are going to be successful if all the above mentioned strategies are used. Motivation, task-based activities and formative/summative assessments are closely inter-connected as shown in Figure 1:

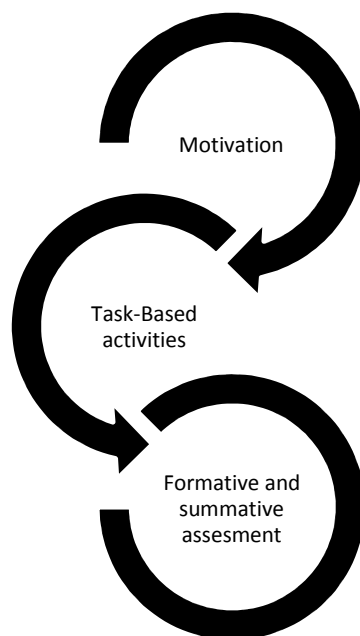


Figure 1: Inter-connection of Motivation, task-based activities and formative/summative assessments

The usage of task-based activities allows students to find out what they already know at first and use the present knowledge. After that they do listening and reading comprehension tasks in order to learn something new. With the contrasting and comparing task they learn how to differentiate what they already know and what is incorrect and at the end by using their own creativity they make presentations with the new vocabulary and knowledge they have just acquired. Appraisal is also very important for students and gives them encouragement to give their best and of course the cooperation with their peers makes them stronger. Summative and formative assessments as part of the grading process which is very important to students keep them motivated and eager to improve their weaker sides.

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